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Americans should be forced to apply for visas to travel to Europe, the European Parliament has said, in response to Washington refusing to allow all Europeans to travel to the States visa-free.

The vote by show of hands is the latest in the ongoing “visa war” between Brussels and the US capital, which now looks set to come to a head after MEPs today agreed that US nationals

crossing the Atlantic should require additional travel documents as long as citizens from five EU countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania) are kept from entering America without a visa. A European Parliament source told Telegraph Travel this was a “serious negative step in the EU-USA visa war”.

### **The US requires nationals from five EU countries to apply for visas**

The EU Commission now has two months to reintroduce visas for Americans wishing to travel to Europe, after MEPs agreed the EU is now “legally obliged” to suspend the Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) with the US for a year after the US administration failed to meet a deadline to respond something called visa reciprocity. Parliament and the European Council will have the chance to object to anything put forward by the Commission.

The need to apply for a visa to travel to a country is widely seen as a turn-off to potential visitors, given the extra cost and time an application requires. A country looking to boost its tourism industry will often look at loosening any existing visa requirements.

The resolution was passed despite warnings from the European Travel Commission (ETC) of the damage a visa war with the US might have on the continent’s tourism industry.

“We fully understand and respect the visa waiver reciprocity mechanism embedded in European legislation to ensure that all nationals of Member States part of Schengen can benefit on equal terms from exemption of visa requirement,” said Eduardo Santander, executive director of the ETC, in a joint letter with Michael de Blust, secretariat of the Network for the European Private Sector in Tourism, to MEPs.

“However, we are very concerned about the economic and political impact of a suspension of visa waiver for US nationals.

Visa applications are seen as off-putting by potential visitors

“Making it more difficult for US citizens to travel to Europe would certainly deprive the European travel and tourism sector of essential revenue, and put thousands of European jobs at stake in one of the few sectors which experiences a strong growth in employment.”

It was in April 2014 the European Commission was first made aware that the US - along with Australia, Brunei, Canada and Japan - was failing to ensure the same visa waiver rights for its citizens that Europe offered in return. The Commission then gave the countries a deadline of two years before retaliating. Since, Australia, Brunei and Japan have all lifted their visa requirements, with Canada set to do the same by the end of the year, but the US has failed to act.

The State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs has said in the past that Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania do not yet meet security requirements for the US VWP.

A State Department official told Telegraph Travel in response to the EU vote: “The objective of

the U.S. Visa Waiver Program is to facilitate travel to the United States while maintaining the highest standards of screening to protect national security.

"The program is open to countries that have very low non-immigrant visitor visa refusal rates and immigration violations, issue secure travel documents, and work closely with U.S. law enforcement and security authorities.

"We have maintained an open dialogue with EU officials—as well as officials from those Member States that require visas for travel to the United States—on this matter. It is premature to speculate on an imposition of visas on U.S. citizens."

Some 30 million American tourists visit Europe each year, spending more than \$54billion (£44bn).

- [Hugh Morris](#)

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